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"LEARNING WHILE DOING"

Broadcast No. 23 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

October 1, 1938 6-6:15 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS

ANNOUNCER

History has bathed Marietta, Ohio, in an atmosphere of mellow antiquity. The very air is redolent of yesteryear--in spite of paved streets, radios, and spanking new automobiles that glide along Front Street. Marietta is hemmed in with hills that fold back, mile after mile from the Muskingum and the Ohio.

ORGAN: BEAUTIFUL OHIO

ANNOUNCER

Like Marietta, the surrounding countryside suggests a ripe old age. Steep hillsides bear scattered patches of cornstalks, sparse, fed by hungry roots. Patches of thin soil are mute evidence that sheet erosion has taken the topsoil, and gullies scar the hillsides. But progressive farmers are doing something about it. And they are aided by men like Herbert B. Van der Poel, head of the department of vocational agriculture. Back in 1930, Mr. Van der Poel and his boys....

SOUND: Noises of schoolroom with 50 boys present. Rapping for order.

VAN DER POEL

Let's get quiet--George, you can settle that after school.

SOUND: Noise subsides.

VAN DER POEL

Now, today's lesson--let's take up some of the problems here in Washington County. Well, let's see.....Joe, what do you think is the biggest problem on your farm?



JOE

Well, Dad says it's gettin' th' crops.

VAN DER POEL

You mean, production is falling off?

JOE

Yeah.

VAN DER POEL

And you know why, don't you?

JOE

Well, I tell him it's 'cause the soil is washed away.

VAN DER POEL

Well, you're probably right. Your problem is to get high yields from land that has lost most of its fertility. Now, what other problems?

BOY

My ol' man says I'm a problem.

SOUND: Uproarious laughter and hoots. Rapping for order.

VAN DER POEL (chuckling)

Well, now, Joe is right about soil erosion. It's probably our biggest single problem. I think we should remember that this is natural tree country. The first settlers found the land heavily forested. Farming steep slopes year after year has worn out the soil. Now, the land that is gullying is not good for crops--so why not put it back to trees?

BOY

My dad told me I could have the whole corner of our pasture if I'd plant it to pine trees.

VAN DER POEL

Now, that's fine. I think we can get the trees from the state nursery just outside of town here, and....

JOE

Can I get some trees for my home beautification work?

VAN DER POEL

...yes, and no, Joe. The home beautification work is entirely different. We're talking now about retiring worn-out land to forest trees. Let's see....we have 49 members in the class. How many of you would take a thousand seedlings and plant them on your home farm?

SOUND: Hubbub of voices, shouting approval, etc.

ORGAN: TREES

ANNOUNCER

Herbert Van der Poel's class in vocational agriculture launched a tree planting program that has brought national recognition. The boys began in a small way, each one planting some trees, each learning while doing. But obstacles occasionally confronted the group...

SOUND: Door opens.

VAN DER POEL

Yes?

BOY

Man from the nursery to see you.

VAN DER POEL

Fine. Ask him to come in.

BOY

Right in here, please.



VAN DER POEL

Oh, hello, John.

JOHN

Hello, Herb. How's everything?

VAN DER POEL

Pretty good, I guess. And you?

JOHN

Fine. Got a crow to pick with you, though.

VAN DER POEL

That so? What's up?

JOHN

One of your boys didn't live up to his promise when we gave him those trees last year.

VAN DER POEL

Oh, I see....yes, I know who you mean.

JOHN

I know it isn't your fault, but I think you ought to give all of them a little friendly talk. Now, this boy received a thousand trees. He planted part of them all right...but he heeled a few of them in...

VAN DER POEL

....and then left them. Yes, I found out about that.

JOHN

Those trees are to be used, Herb, not to be thrown away. A thousand trees will cover about one acre of land, and heaven knows, there's plenty of land around here that ought to be put to trees. I wish you'd impress that on the boys--that trees are to be used.

VAN DER POEL

Well, John, that one boy's mistake will be a lesson to the others.
Our tree planting project is going right ahead.

JOHN

O. K., Herb, I understand and your boys are on the right track.

ORGAN: TREES

ANNOUNCER

And the project did go ahead. Similar classes planted approximately 40,000 seedling trees a year. They set up tree-planting demonstrations along the roadsides. They purchased a worn-out farm for reforestation...but one day....

SOUND: Boys digging trench.

VAN DER POEL (fading in)

...that's right, Joe, you've got your layer of sand and you're ready for a layer of walnuts. Help him there, Dale.

BOY

Sure.

JOE

Hey, what's that smoke?

EVERYONE (in general confusion)

Where? Why, that farmer is burning his woods over again! He ought to know better than that.

VAN DER POEL

Boys, there's a lesson you all can learn. Never burn over your woodlands. Burning destroys the young seedlings, drives out wildlife, and destroys the humus in the soil.

JOE

It sure leaves the ground bare.

SOUND: Crackling of fire in distance.

VAN DER POEL

Of course it does. A forest will prevent erosion, but it's got to have the litter along with it....Say, that fire is blowing over this way.

SOUND: Crackling of fire becomes louder.

BOY

Hey! We'd better get over there! That fire is spreading into this field!

SOUND: General confusion, boys rushing through brush, shouting, etc.

VAN DER POEL

That's the idea.

SOUND: Boys beating brush with burlap sacks. Fire dies away.

JOE

That's about got it. It wasn't so bad.

VAN DER POEL

No, but it's a good thing that we happened to be around, or all of those seedlings would have been killed.

JOE

That's the truth.

VAN DER POEL

Look here, boys. All of you come over here.

JOE

The fire sure killed that one.

VAN DER POEL

Here you see what fire can do to young trees. A few minutes ago this tree was alive--doing its part to hold the soil. But now--see for yourself. Well, that's another lesson in woodland management. You boys are the farmers of tomorrow. I feel sure that you won't hand down worn-out farms to your sons--farms that are gone just as completely as this burned seedling. The future of American agriculture rests with boys such as you.

ORGAN:

ANNOUNCER

Herbert Van der Poel's vocational agriculture classes represent the efforts of thousands of boys--farmers of tomorrow--who are learning little lessons of soil conservation--learning while doing. And these thousands of boys are leading the way toward better land use in the America that will be theirs to husband.

ORGAN:

ANNOUNCER

That is the story of one vocational agriculture class, and it came to us from the Soil Conservation Service, in Dayton, Ohio. Here is Ewing Jones, your weekly spokesman from that Service, so we'll ask him to keep the story moving.

JONES

_____, I don't know about this particular story. Mr. Van der Poel is doing a swell job in keeping his classes moving from year to year, and they deserve the national recognition that they have attained. But what interests me most, is that these boys are learning while doing.

ANNOUNCER

And doesn't that apply to the CCC camps, too?

JONES

Yes, it does, and that swings us right into the next part of today's discussion. If you'll recall, we just completed an essay contest among CCC enrollees.

ANNOUNCER

Yes, I remember. It was on the subject of soil conservation districts.

JONES

....and the response was really encouraging. I'm just sorry that I can't thank each of the enrollees in person for the way they entered into the spirit of things. And frankly, I was surprised at the knowledge of the subject these enrollees showed.

ANNOUNCER

It's too bad that they couldn't all be winners. Any honorable mentions?

JONES

Why, I think that Gerald Lasley, of the Elizabethtown, Kentucky, camp gave the winner the most competition. And as a group, the bunch at Eaton, Ohio, certainly comes in for praise. I can tell that the superintendent, the commanding officer, and the educational adviser really gave the boys some encouragement.

ANNOUNCER

And how about the winner?

JONES

He's right here with us. His name is David L. Beard, and he's from the CCC camp at Lexington, Indiana. And I'm going to ask David, and his camp superintendent, Noel Westbrook, to join this discussion. Mr. Westbrook, I suppose you're proud of David Beard, aren't you?



WESTBROOK

I certainly am, Ewing. I'm not only proud of him for winning the contest, but it's mighty encouraging to see the interest he has taken in soil conservation districts. Indiana has a district law, you know, and David may be one of the leaders in a district some day.

JONES

Is that right, David?

BEARD

I'll do all I can. After all, in that essay I said that the future of soil conservation lies in cooperation, and I'm going to practice what I preach.

JONES

I'm sure you will. And, David, just what type of work are you doing over in southeastern Indiana?

BEARD

Well, right now we're doing work that more or less ties in with the tree planting classes at Marietta, Ohio. We're busy collecting seed.

JONES

In other words, you're gathering the little acorns that will some day be the great oaks that will hold the soil in Indiana.

WESTBROOK

We're gathering more than acorns, Ewing: Black locust, black walnuts, tulip poplar, ash--just to mention a few.

JONES

How much seed does your camp expect to collect this fall?

WESTBROOK

We've set _____ pounds as our goal.

JONES

That's a lot of seed, and it ought to make a lot of trees.

WESTBROOK

Yes, it will. But there's one thing, don't get the impression that each seed will some day be a tree. Take black locust, for example. A pound of black locust seed contains around 25,000 seeds. We'll probably get around 1,500 or 2,000 seedlings from that, and not all of those seedlings will survive, of course.

JONES

I suppose that walnuts and acorns are the easiest to collect.

WESTBROOK

Oh, yes, because they're on the ground.

BEARD

.....and we have to climb trees to get seed from black locust trees. That is, unless we're cutting the trees for fence posts.

JONES

And where do these seeds go, Mr. Westbrook?

WESTBROOK

We send them to the Soil Conservation Service nursery at Washington, Indiana. Some of them will be planted at the nursery this fall, and others will be stratified. We send them to the nursery almost immediately, because some of the seeds germinate rapidly.

BEARD

I'll say they do. In fact, I've seen some white oak seeds that germinated right on the tree.



JONES

That is fast work. And from the nursery, of course, the trees go out to erosion control projects and CCC camps in Indiana where they are put to work holding down the soil--conserving corn belt soil. All right, thank you, Noel Westbrook, superintendent of the Lexington, Indiana, CCC camp, and David L. Beard, CCC enrollee, essay contest winner, and seed collecting authority. I know that, like the boys in the vocational agriculture classes, you're learning while doing.

ANNOUNCER

Ewing, before you get away, there's one more question: you just mentioned conserving corn belt soil. As I recall, isn't that the name of a bulletin, too?

JONES

Yes, "Conserving Corn Belt Soil" has proven to be one of the most popular bulletins on the subject of soil conservation that we've distributed.

ANNOUNCER

Then it must have something on the ball.

JONES

Well, it does explain the various soil-saving measures that have been found to be effective here in the Ohio Valley, and it's well illustrated.

ANNOUNCER

And I assume that copies of "Conserving Corn Belt Soil" can still be secured by writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio?

JONES

That's correct, _____.



ANNOUNCER

Now, are we going to wash away any fortunes next week?

JONES

Just the opposite. We're going to tell the story of a farmer who has been tilling the same sloping land for about 30 years, and he's made money every year, and he's kept his soil from eroding. No fortunes washed away there.

ANNOUNCER

All right, Ewing, and goodbye until next week. Copies of the bulletin, "Conserving Corn Belt Soil," may be obtained by writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Next week, blue ribbon farming....

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is an educational presentation of the Nation's Station.

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